

Deafening Sound by Annie Flanagan

Statement:

Deafening Sound looks at rape culture and gendered violence in the United States through photography, film and collected artifacts. This project aims to reduce the stigma of sexual violence for those impacted and to elevate consciousness about the prevalence of rape culture.

In order to understand the scale and scope of rape culture within the United States we must look beyond what it means to experience gendered and sexual violence. We must work to understand individual stories, the types of support networks that exist for those who have experienced this violence and examine the evidence of cultural norms and assumptions about rape and gendered violence.

Deafening Sound examines the complicated cycle of abuse and the deep roots of rape culture through different chapters, which each focus on different ways that gendered violence persists. I intend for this project to become an educational tool; it will succeed if it sparks a conversation about ways that we can be better to each other on both individual and societal levels.

This project started when my best friend, Hannah, left her abusive boyfriend of five years. During this relationship she experienced long-term exposure to emotional trauma, where she had little control and there was no hope of escape. Her recovery was far from simple, as she experience extreme PTSD. This chapter (We Grew Up With Gum In Our Hair) and the accompanying video (Love, Hannah) focuses on the correlation between domestic violence and PTSD.

In 2012, I began photographing with best friends Nekqua and Brittney during their final years of high school in Syracuse, New York. Months into this project, these girls experienced sexual assault, in different experiences on the same day. This chapter (Hey, Best Friend!) focuses on Nekqua's recovery and works to understand the struggles young women must overcome in dealing with sexual assault.

As I noticed a theme arising in my work, I decided to commit to documenting rape culture and gendered violence. Since 2013 I have worked closely with a women's shelter in Williston, North Dakota, documenting the impact of the oil boom on the rise of domestic violence.

This year I developed two chapters that address how ingrained this violence is in America. One is a series of black and white Polaroid portraits of survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence. My goal with this chapter is to make as many portraits as possible; part of the power will be in the sheer number of portraits. There is no limit to when I can produce these portraits; I constantly make them as I meet survivors. The other is a collection of artifacts that speaks to the fact that gendered violence does not exist in a vacuum and we need to be aware and critical of messages of violence and misogyny.